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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Almighty God, awe and wonder grip us as we think about Your love, wisdom, and power. Thank You for choosing us to serve You and country. Guide us in our work and strengthen us for every challenge.

Lord, bless our lawmakers. Give them the wisdom to make a commitment to integrity. May they refuse to deviate from right paths, seeking always to accomplish Your purposes on Earth. Use them to help those whose hopes are crushed, who live on life's margins with no expectations of better times to come.

Remind our Senators each day of their accountability to You. May they press on with the duties of this day with hope in their hearts.

We pray in Your holy Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TOOMEY). Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Stephen Alexander Vaden, of Tennessee, to be General Counsel of the Department of Agriculture.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that following the cloture vote on the Kelley nomination, the Senate recess until 2:15; further, if cloture is invoked, all time during the recess counts postcloture on the nomination.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, the Senate returned from our Thanksgiving recess and got back to work.

Since the election earlier this month, there has been plenty of prognostication about what the new Congress will bring, but I would rather focus on the one we are still involved in, and this Congress has more business to complete before the end of the year. Even after two historic years of accomplishments for the American people, there are still important items left to check off our list.

Yesterday evening, we voted to advance the nomination of Stephen Vaden, the President's choice, to serve as general counsel for the Department of Agriculture.

Mr. Vaden has strong legal credentials, both public and private sector experience, degrees from Vanderbilt and Yale, and he comes with an upbringing in agriculture. He grew up on his family's farm in Union City, TN—and according to the Tennessee Farm Bureau,

it shows. As my friend Senator ALEXANDER referenced yesterday, that organization wrote that Vaden has "a passion for agriculture that can't be taught, but that is necessary for the job" of general counsel.

It is hardly surprising, then, that this nominee received bipartisan support at the committee level, including the support of the ranking member.

What is surprising? The fact that since clearing the committee, Mr. Vaden's nomination has languished for 351 days, waiting for Senate Democrats to end their obstruction—long, even by the standards of this Congress. So I hope that each of my colleagues will join me in turning the page and voting to confirm Mr. Vaden later today.

Following the Vaden nomination, we will turn to consideration of Karen Kelley to serve as Deputy Secretary of Commerce. She is a graduate of Villanova. She has built a 35-year record of expertise in investment, management, and financial strategy.

She currently serves as Undersecretary—a position to which she was unanimously confirmed by the Senate—and oversees the Department's statistical programs through the U.S. Census Bureau and the Bureau of Economic Analysis. Ms. Kelley is already acting in the role to which she has been nominated.

Through this service, Ms. Kelley has earned the respect and esteem of her colleagues at the Department. Secretary Ross has said he is thankful to have such a qualified individual fill the position.

I hope my colleagues will join me in voting to advance her nomination today with a strong bipartisan vote.

As we look over the record of this 115th Congress, a number of accomplishments were made possible with significant bipartisan support—from landmark opioid legislation to major improvements in veterans' medical care and services, to our tremendous progress on appropriations and a lot more.

● This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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